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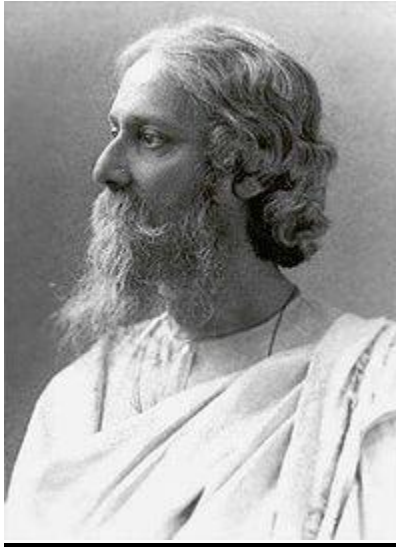
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Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education

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From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore

Tagore's Childhood, Education and Achievements

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Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is one among the greatest writers of modern Indian literature. He was a great Bengali poet, novelist, educator, and an early advocate of Independence for India. He was born on 7th May, 1861. At the end of the 17th century, his forefathers had migrated from their native lands to Govindpur (one of the three villages which later came to constitute Calcutta). He was the 14th child of his parents. His brothers and sisters were poets, musicians, playwrights and novelists. This family was also involved in diverse activities at the national level.

Tagore was born in a rich family of Bengal. A teacher came to teach him at home. Tagore was not interested in his academic studies. He was interested in drama, music, art and poetry. The manner of his early schooling was to leave a deep impression on him. When he was 12, his father took him to a meditation centre. Here he learned Sanskrit, astronomy and the scriptures that formed the basis of his reformed religion. In 1878, he was sent to London to qualify for the Indian Civil Service or as a lawyer. He took his matriculation examination and then joined University College, London. There he enjoyed British social life and Western music. But he returned home suddenly after some eighteen months without completing his education.

Rabindranath continued his personal education and his creative writing and music even after coming back to India. Tagore married when he was 23. At this stage, he had started to share his father's religious responsibilities in the Unitarian Universal Church.

Nobel Prize

All of us know about the fame of Rabindranath Tagore as a poet, novelist and educator. He was awarded Noble Prize for literature. He was the first Indian to get this prize for literature. He became very famous now. He got this prize in 1913. Tagore travelled through Europe, America, China and Japan. People spoke highly of his learning. He was honored and admired for his extraordinary literary genius and fine speeches.

Two years later he was awarded the knighthood by the British government but he surrendered it in 1919 as a protest against the Massacre of Amritsar, where British troops killed some 400 Indian demonstrators. The University of Calcutta gave him the degree of Doctor of Letters.

Tagore's Philosophy of Education

Tagore was famous as a poet and novelist. He was famous as an educator. The meaning of the word *educator* is a teacher, a specialist in the theory and practice of education, an administrator of a school or an educational institution. Tagore was totally fit in all these frames.

The word *education* has a Latin derivation. The meaning of this word is "educare" in Latin Dictionary, which means bringing up children physically and mentally. But normally education is regarded as synonymous with school instruction. But it is not true; it is only part of

the education process. The main aim of education is to prepare the student for future life so that he or she acquires the necessary equipment to discharge his or her responsibilities successfully.

Not in Favor of Modern Education

Tagore was not in favor of modern education. He wrote, “A boy in this country has very little time at his disposal. He must learn a foreign language, pass several examinations and qualify himself for a job in the shortest possible time. So, what can he do but cram up a few text books with breathless speed? His parents and his teachers do not let him waste precious time by reading a book of entertainment, and they snatch it away from him the moment they see him with one.” (Rabindranath Tagore in his *Towards Universal Man*, Kabir 1961:34)

Tagore’s Philosophy – Start Well in the Beginning Years!

Although Tagore is a very famous person of India, his progressive educational philosophy is largely forgotten today. He wrote about many ideals for education but his ideals have not found their way into India’s schools. According to Tagore, if we want to give proper education to the students, we should teach them well right from the beginning when they are very young. But, in India, it is not like that because the teachers who teach the students of primary schools are not well trained for that job. He wrote that they knew neither good English nor good Bengali and the only work they could do was mistreating students.

Tagore played a vital role to tell the society about the principles of teaching and about the role of a teacher in society.

Like Tagore, Sidney Hook also wrote about education and its role in the society: “Education is the one that plays a certain integrative role within its culture and in this sense a good education will formally be the same in every culture” (Hook 1946:29).

Against the Heavy Load of Books and Bags

Tagore was against the heavy load of books and bags students had to carry to the school. Tagore notices that, at the very starting age of the life of a student, his/her parents keep a lot of burden of bags and books on his/her shoulders. He wrote, “From childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded backs” (Kabir 1961:67). According to Tagore, it makes education joyless. He was in favor of easy education, that is, education through music, art, literature and nature, etc. He wrote that the books we read have no vivid pictures of our homes and our society. He also felt that our education is directing us to a land of enchanting falsehood.

Indian Schools are Factories

Tagore rightly called Indian schools as a factory. He wrote that in the morning the factory opens with the ringing of a bell, and then as the teachers start talking, the machines start

working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes and the pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning.

How Can We Become Good Teachers?

According to Tagore, if a person wants to be a good teacher s/he should follow some points like removing the fear of teacher from the minds of students; changing the view of teachers relating to the purpose and method of education; using narrative imagination; focusing on the education of rural children; promoting the freedom of the child; and last but not least, kindling an awakening in the minds of the students.

Eradication of Fear and Corporal Punishment

It is true that the majority of Indian teachers today believe that fear is a necessary condition for learning. But Tagore's views were totally different. He thought that as a teacher we should provide such an environment, that students have confidence to express their own learning ability. Tagore was opposed to any form of corporal punishment to discipline students because he thought that fear of making mistakes prevents an individual from being free to venture a new thought, to innovate, to ask questions, to be creative, etc. Discipline should be based on motivations like joy and pursuit of creative tasks. But even in recent times, and even in Kolkata, teachers are caught punishing the students violently. Many students died as a result of being beaten by their teachers in India. Tagore did not follow these things in his own school.

His Thoughts on Education Come from His Own Experience

Tagore's views on education are not available in any single volume. It is traceable in his various expressions. His ideas were derived mainly from his own experience. According to him our modern education system is not so good because it does not allow us to cultivate the power of thought and the power of imagination. Tagore wrote, "To read without thinking is like accumulating building materials without building anything. We instantly climb to the top of our pile and beat it down incessantly for two years. Until it becomes level and somewhat becomes level and somewhat resembles the flat roof of a house" (Kabir 1961:34).

Lack of Education – Impediment to the Progress of India

According to Tagore, lack of education is main obstacle in the way of India's progress and at the root of all its problems. It is true that in our country the basic objectives of education system, such as promoting creativity, freedom, joy and an awareness of a cultural heritage were completely ignored. At the time of Tagore, Indians have been divided into two parts due to the medium of education that was English. One who received this education and second those who did not. He worked hard for the improvement of education system in India.

Tagore's Involvement in Education

From children's education and rural development, he increasingly shifted his attention to university education and developing the surrounding villages as one of the university's functions. He wanted to devise an alternative form of education. He wanted to reveal the unnaturalness of the system of education in our country, its lack of links with the nation and its management which was in the hands of a foreign government. The working of the government, its courts of law and its education system were conducted in a language completely unintelligible to the majority of Indians. The main cause behind the awareness of the people was lack of the use of mother-tongue.

Santiniketan

When Rabindranath was 12, his father took him to a meditation centre which was established in 1863. During their brief stay there, Davendranath gave his son lessons in Sanskrit, English literature and religion; he explored the mountains and forests. During his stay there he came in touch with nature in all its manifestations in the environment.

All of us know that in human society, necessity is a greater force than charity. The first requirement therefore is that people should discover the bond that holds them together as a society. If anyone wants to achieve this s/he has to choose education. In 1901 he left Seliadah where he had undertaken these experiments and moved to Santiniketan where, with his father's consent, he started a boarding school. The Brahmacharyashram (or Ashram) school was inaugurated on 22nd December 1901 with some pupils; his son was also one of them. This school was very famous in the world. It had no grand building. This was an open air school. It was really a matter of great pride that our Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi studied in this institution.

In 1912 he left for the United Kingdom once again. Some of his works had already been translated into English and had attracted the attention of the well-known English painter Sir William Rothenstein and the poet W.B. Yeats.

The second experiment by Tagore was Sri Niketan. Santiniketan developed continuously from 1901 to 1921. Tagore was convinced that some new form of schooling could be worked out for the village children in India based on life in the countryside. He had purchased an old building and some land at a village called Surul, not far from Santiniketan. After that he met Leonard Elmhirst in U.S. in 1921. He was at that time reading agricultural science at Cornell University and was keen on spending some time in India doing rural reconstruction work. Tagore wanted that he suggest some remedial action to develop the school.

Throw Out the Belief in Fate!

Tagore was disappointed that Santiniketan had failed to achieve that ideal of bringing scientific knowledge to bear on life in the countryside. In order to improve the human condition in the villages of Eastern India, the population had to throw off their belief in fate and realize the importance of depending upon their own efforts. It was the reason which forced Tagore to launch

the new school, named Shikshasastra in Sri Niketan. Tagore tried to convince his countrymen through his speeches, stories, novels, poems and songs to do something for rural people.

Education with Joy!

Main aim of Tagore was to provide study with joy. According to him picnics , excursions, games, music, metrical performances and celebrating socio-religious festivals constituted regular features of the calendar. New Year's Day, the Rainy Season festival, the New Rice festival, and the Spring festival were - and still are – all regular features.

Work Education! And Enjoyment of Nature!!

Tagore was in favor of good education, in which a teacher can prepare the student for good future and character as well. So he introduced work education as –“a joyous exercise of our inventive and constructive energies that help to build up character” (Tagore 1931). It is right to say that in our childhood we learn everything with the aid of our body and mind, with all the senses active and eager. When we are sent to school, the doors of natural information are closed to us; our eyes see the letters, our ears hear the lessons, but our mind misses the perpetual stream of ideas from nature, because the teachers, in their wisdom, think these bring distraction and have no purpose behind them. But Tagore was in favor of teaching the things from nature a lot.

In his book, *Glimpses of Bengal*, Tagore wrote,

Yesterday, the first day of *Asarh* the enthronement of the rainy season was celebrated with due pomp and circumstance. It was very hot the whole day, but in the afternoon dense clouds rolled up in stupendous masses.

I thought to myself this first day of the rains , I would rather risk getting wet than remain confined in my dungeon of a cabin (Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal*, e-book 2005).

Again, in the same book, Tagore described the natural things in a very beautiful way by writing these lines:

After walking about a mile we came to a dam , and along the pool of water there was a row of *tal* (fan palm) trees, under which was a natural spring. While we stood there looking at this, we found that the line of cloud which we had seen in the North was making for us, swollen and grown darker, flashes of lightning gleaming the while (Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal*, e-book 2005).

Tagore's love for nature reveals why he was in favor of education through natural elements in his school Santiniketan. It is apt to say about Tagore:

As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the global village, Rabindranath Tagore's educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for

education within multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations, amidst conditions of acknowledged economic discrepancy and political imbalance (O'Connell 2003).

A Message for Entire Humankind

The achievements of Rabindranath Tagore in all these fields are so great that they mark him out as one of the greatest sons of India and, indeed, one who has a message for entire humankind. Everyone in India recognizes him as the winner of Nobel Prize in literature, the philosopher who stood with Gandhi and other great persons of his day. Some Indians are admirers of his poetry and other works. But, throughout India, every student recognizes him as the author of India's National Anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*.

Kathleen O'Connell rightly wrote about the philosophy of Tagore:

In Tagore's philosophy of education, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual - if not more so - and music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school (O'Connell 2003).

In Tagore's view, the higher aim of education was the same as that of a person's life, that is, to achieve fulfillment and completeness. There was a lesser aim that of providing the individual with a satisfactory means of livelihood, without which a person would not be able to satisfy his/her basic requirements and thus fail to achieve either of these two aims. Tagore also thought that the limitless development of man is possible only in an environment free from any kind of bondage.

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